



COUNTRY PRESENTATION – MAURITIUS

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The Use of ODL in Mauritius

Mauritius is presently at a crossroads in the provision of Higher Education. With universal primary education achieved in the seventies and a substantial growth in Secondary education since the nineties, the country is facing a strong pressure on the post secondary and tertiary education. There are only two Universities operating mainly on face to face basis, and new strategies in place for expansion of access to tertiary education. Without these, the country will find it hard to meet the growing demand for qualified professionals at mid and senior managerial and technical levels in the years to come.

The importance of an increased use of ODL in Mauritius is therefore three-fold:

- **First**, ODL can enhance the provision of a pathway to all youngsters completing secondary education. These students have a growing need of academic post secondary qualification in areas of need, in particular in a context of a shift in the national economy from a low skilled textile and tourism industry to a high skilled economy based on the IT and knowledge sectors, along with other specialised fields which the country is opening up such as the medical and financial fields.
- **Secondly**, not only does the country need experts at the top level it also equally importantly needs more semi-professionals at diploma level to meet the new sectors' demand in middle experts to support the needs of industry. ODL will therefore not only provide a supply of academics and top experts, but also provide skills training, at certificate and diploma levels, in the TVET sector.
- **Finally**, ODL is also required in the re-skilling of those already in employment where, with the existing shifts in the economy from a low-skilled labour to a professional services oriented economy, there is a need to retrain workers in all sectors. This life long learning through ODL can certainly assist Mauritius in expanding the existing workforce to be adapted to new economic niche areas yet where Mauritius may have a comparative advantage.

Private providers in ODL

There is presently limited provision by the public education and training sector in Open and Distance Learning. On the other hand, several private providers in Mauritius have already developed linkages with international distance education institutions for the delivery of Post Secondary qualifications, such as UNISA, TAFE Australia and IGNOU. Yet, it is believed that the country can still benefit from ODL in key areas where there is a need for skilled human resource.

The way forward in ODL: Setting up of an Open University in Mauritius

Mauritius, as a small island state where access to tertiary education is restricted by virtue of limited resources at both human and infrastructural level, is presently working on strategies to remove barriers for access to post secondary and tertiary education, through the emergence of a flexible, accessible and cost effective educational system that will tap on the existing resources at technical, vocational and university education levels.

It is expected that this should impact should significantly enhance the quality and provision of post secondary education locally and for the sub region.

In this context, the Ministry is presently working on the setting up of an Open University of Mauritius (OUM), and is in the process of recruiting an expert to drive the project.

The proposed OUM will work with Governmental, international and local inter-governmental institutions and relevant sectoral ministries as well as the private sector to support an enabling environment that will encourage the emergence of a culture of life long learning in all sectors and highly qualified human resource at diploma, graduate and post-graduate levels. Such an intensive human resource development and upgrading is an essential prerequisite for the implementation of the targets set for the smooth operation of the new economic trajectory of the country.

Priority Areas for Mauritius

These are:

1. Recruitment of an international expert in ODL to drive Open University project.
2. Expansions of TVET education through ODL in key areas.

3. Expansion of higher education in areas where the two local universities cannot presently meet the demand.
4. Foster LLL and the re-training of the present workforce into new sectors.

What can COL do to further the Agenda?

1. Teacher and Heads of Schools Training
 - COL can assist Mauritius to link up with other international ODL stakeholders to develop programmes for Heads of Schools and teacher training.
2. Training programmes through mixed mode for Vocational courses
 - With the current shortage in vocational and middle level technical skills prevailing in Mauritius, COL can assist Mauritius to develop training and re-skilling programmes in this sector.
3. Development of RPL in Mauritius
 - COL can consolidate its present collaboration in the ODL sector in further developing and expanding Recognition of Prior Learning which is presently in a pilot phase locally, in particular to include new areas where a pool of locally informally skilled labour exists.

Country Presentation

Mauritius

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COL focal points meeting – Lilongwe, Malawi, 22-23 May 2008

In a nutshell

- Country Population : 1.3 million
- Country Size : 2000 sq km
- 2 public universities
- Population 20-24 years : 98,000
- Current GTER : 36 % - Tertiary Enrolment : 36,000
- Little provision through DE in public institutions
- Several private providers through foreign DE agencies (IGNOU, TAFE, UNISA, USQ...) – Small market so fees relatively high

Niche Areas

- Textile
- Tourism
- Sugar Products
- BPO and related services
- Medical tourism
- Financial Services
- Marine Resources (Physical and Biological)
- Knowledge Oriented services

Human Resource Requirements

Gap in HR at technical, TVET and middle professional levels

- Need for graduates in areas of high demand (Mgmt, Law, IT, Finance, engineering...) and targeted GTER is 40% in 2010 and 45 % in 2015
- Teacher training
- Training and reskilling to meet demand of industry and public service

ODL to assist HRD

- Expand access to post secondary education
- Upgrade quality of HR base
- Reskill existing workforce in areas of key need

Setting up an Open University

- Project coordinator being recruited
- Work out implementation plan for DE
- Complement face to face provision with DE
- Establish int'l linkages for course development
- Lead training local institutions in DE provision
- Set up a national DE coordination unit
- Start new programmes

Challenges in ODL

- Cost of connectivity – cost factor needs to be considered
- Small local market – Would also serve needs of the sub region. Framework developed for Mauritius as a hub for export of educational services and DE can assist.
- Lack of local expertise in ODL
- Brain drain
- Secondary level feeder base needs to grow – Foundation and top up courses required

Top priorities

- Operationalize the Open University to federate provision in DE in areas of high demand
- Expand provision of TVET through DE
- Enhance teacher development at postgrad (secondary) and undergrad (primary)
- Train heads of educational institutions
- Retrain unskilled labour through DE and with the use of RPL

Conclusion

- Major HRD requirements in the years to come
- ODL can contribute – if used in a locally harmonised and rational context bringing together local partners
- Need for DE to contribute to needs of the region through a knowledge hub strategy in both academic and corporate fields

• Thank you !

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